

A reader has come into some really big money

By Roger Boye

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Today's column answers more questions about old coins and paper money.

Q—I've inherited a 1923 silver certificate that's considerably larger than today's paper money. Is it an error? Does the size make my bill special?

W.R., Wheaton

A—Before 1929, greenbacks were about 1¼ inch longer and ½ inch wider than today's specimens. Uncle Sam reduced the size to save paper and ink, and to make bills easier to use.

Your certificate retails for about \$15 if in at least "fine condition." Most U.S. large-size bills have value as collectibles, and they still are legal tender.

Q—Imagine my surprise when I found four silver quarters in a roll I got from the bank. The oldest was 1937. How could these coins remain out for so long?

N.B., Highland Park

A—Most likely, someone "cashed in" a hoard of old coins without realizing that silver quarters are worth at least three times face value for their metal content, and that some have additional value as collectibles. Or perhaps the coins you found were part of a stolen collection that was "spent" by the thief.

Q—How rare is a 1992 proof set with two dimes but no nickel? I got it from the government.

T.G., Chicago

A—Proof-set packaging errors make for great conversation pieces but usually have little special value on the hobby market. Your set probably would retail in the \$15 to \$20 range, standard for "normal" 1992 sets.

Q—Ten years ago we bought some South African Krugerrands as a way to invest in gold. Are they worth more or less than American Eagles?

C.J., Chicago

A—Slightly less. Krugerrands have the smallest premium over gold value of any of the popularly traded bullion gold coins. For example, earlier this summer a leading dealer was selling one-ounce Krugerrands for "spot" plus \$5 while American Eagles and Canadian Maple Leafs were going for "spot" plus \$16.

Q—Someone carved the letters "CSA" on the back side of our 1854 half dollar. Do they have any significance?

W.S., Schiller Park

A—They probably are the initials of one of your coin's former owners, or perhaps they stand for "Confederate States of America." Years ago, people engraved their initials in coins, often using ornate lettering and various artistic motifs.